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STATE FOR SA/INS AND S/CT

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: VISIT OF S/CT COORDINATOR AMB. J. COFER BLACK

Classified By: JAMES F. ENTWISTLE, Deputy Chief of Mission. REASON: 1
.4 (B,D).

SUMMARY

1. (C) In meetings with Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) officials on September 8, Coordinator for Counterterrorism Ambassador J. Cofer Black underscored U.S. appreciation of Sri Lanka's support of the Global War on Terror. He emphasized USG commitment to helping the GSL achieve a peaceful resolution to Sri Lanka's lengthy ethnic conflict, while stressing that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) will remain on the Foreign Terrorist Organizations list until it renounces violence in word and deed. GSL interlocutors thanked Ambassador Black for the firm line the U.S. has adopted against the LTTE, asserting that the U.S. stance had helped convince the Tigers to sign the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement. Most interlocutors attributed the recent spike in violence to LTTE efforts to quell internal dissension in the East, but agreed that the Tigers are not contemplating a return to full-scale hostilities. Ambassador Black also addressed a well-attended media roundtable with local print, radio and television journalists. End summary.

MEETINGS WITH MFA, SECURITY AND
INTELLIGENCE OFFICIALS

2. (U) On September 8 Coordinator for Counterterrorism Ambassador J. Cofer Black met with Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) officials involved in foreign affairs, security, defense and intelligence. Interlocutors included Foreign Secretary H.M.G.S. Palihakkara; Secretary of Defense Cyril

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Herath; Secretary of Public Security, Law, and Order Tilak Ranaviraja; Director of Internal Intelligence Keerthi Gajanayake; Director of Military Intelligence Major General Kapila Hendawitharana; and Inspector General of Police Indra De Silva. Ambassador Black was accompanied by the Charge.

SRI LANKAN COOPERATION IN GLOBAL ANTI-TERROR EFFORTS

3. (C) Ambassador Black opened the meeting with the Foreign Secretary by thanking Palihakkara for his government's

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support in the global campaign against terror. He attributed recent progress made against al-Qaeda to the successful cooperation the U.S. has received from its international partners in this fight, but noted the need for greater and more concerted international pressure to be levied against state sponsors of terrorism. In particular, he urged the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) to exert its influence with the governments of Iran and Syria to cease their support of international terrorist organizations. Sri Lanka has every reason to support the global war on terror because it has suffered so much from acts of terrorism over the past two decades, Palihakkara responded, adding that the GSL in the past has used its membership in the Non-Aligned Movement, APEC, SAARC and other international and regional groupings to push stronger counter-terrorist agendas. As Sri Lanka's Ambassador to Thailand (mid-2001 to mid-2004), Palihakkara said his mission had worked closely with USG law enforcement agencies to exchange information and to improve surveillance of suspicious individuals and organizations.

4. (C) Dr. Rohan Perera, Legal Advisor for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the UN Ad Hoc Committee on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism, noted that the GSL has taken its obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 1373 very seriously. Chairing the Ad Hoc Committee on Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism, the GSL is spearheading efforts to draft a nuclear terrorism convention and a comprehensive counter-terrorism convention. He reported hearing "more moderate voices" from OIC member states during the June Working Group meeting on the nuclear

terrorism convention, adding that even Syria was "much less strident than usual," while Jordan offered "some constructive proposals." Turkey was especially helpful as Chair of the last Working Group, he said, noting that he expects upcoming OIC Chair Morocco to play a similarly cooperative role during the 6th Committee meeting in October. During the most recent SAARC Summit in Islamabad, he continued, the GSL had taken the initiative to call for a protocol on terrorist financing.

The GSL's special efforts not to ascribe an ethnic or religious dimension to terrorism in these international fora--not to "Islamicize" terror--have helped keep counter-terrorism cooperation and initiatives "moving along," Palihakkara observed. Ambassador Black commended the GSL for being "a force for positive change behind the scenes."

LTTE AND PROSPECTS FOR NEGOTIATIONS

15. (C) Foreign Secretary Palihakkara thanked Ambassador Black for the USG's "constructive position" on designating the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO), which he described as supporting the GSL's efforts to urge the LTTE back to the negotiating table. International "disapproval" is essential to making the Tigers realize that they must approach negotiations with more flexibility and a greater willingness to compromise than they have demonstrated so far, he stated. Despite many recent "challenges," primarily from LTTE violations and assassinations of political opponents, the Ceasefire Agreement is still holding, he asserted, with no imminent fundamental threat to its continuation. The GSL has decided to take "a patient line" in response to LTTE violations, Palihakkara said, because maintaining the Ceasefire Agreement is crucial to further progress toward negotiations. In a separate meeting, Public Security, Law, and Order Secretary Tilak Ranaviraja also expressed his thanks to Ambassador Black for the consistent USG message regarding the Tigers' designation as an FTO, in addition to the United States' constant call for a political solution to the ethnic conflict.

16. (C) The lack of progress toward resuming negotiations is not due to any fundamental disagreement on substance between the two parties, Palihakkara said, adding that the GSL already had "gone more than the extra mile to accommodate the LTTE's pre-negotiation demands," including consideration of the Tigers' proposal for an Interim Self-Governing Authority (ISGA). Even the recalcitrant Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP), the Government's pro-nationalist coalition partner, has agreed to allow the ISGA as part of a possible agenda for talks. The LTTE knows, moreover, that reverting to full-scale conflict is "not an option." Nor would it want to, suggested officials from the Directorate of Internal Intelligence (DII). The LTTE has made thousands of dollars in "taxes" collected from travelers since the road to Jaffna reopened and is busily building the infrastructure of a de facto "interim administration," the DII officials charged.

17. (C) All GSL interlocutors identified the LTTE's new feeling of "vulnerability" as stemming from the unprecedented rebellion last March of its powerful Eastern military commander and his cadres as the key obstacle to resuming talks. Once Karuna's approximately 6,000 cadres disbanded in the East, the LTTE has had difficulty re-establishing a strong armed presence in that region. The LTTE feels weakened by this internal fragmentation and is unlikely to pursue negotiations until it believes it has successfully faced down this threat from within its own ranks. Secretary of Defense Cyril Herath, Director of Internal Intelligence (DII) Keerthi Gajanayake and Director of Military Intelligence (DMI) Major General Kapila Hendawitharana provided a similar assessment to Ambassador Black, with Herath asserting that the LTTE would never reestablish full control in the East. While the GSL realizes the Tigers' need for internal stability and has decided it can wait until the LTTE feels ready, the Foreign Secretary said, the international community can play a helpful role by "reminding the LTTE they need to show by their actions they have learned the art of compromise." Noting that Norwegian Special Envoy Solheim is scheduled to visit Sri Lanka next week, Palihakkara reported that the GSL has indicated to Norwegian facilitators that it is "ready to discuss with the LTTE (possible modalities of) interim authority at any time, including the ISGA," as one of the proposals on the table. The U.S. wants to support GSL efforts to secure a peaceful resolution to the lengthy conflict, Ambassador Black told all interlocutors, and will continue to emphasize that the LTTE will remain on the Foreign Terrorist Organizations List until it renounces violence in word and act.

NEW AND IMPROVED LTTE?

18. (C) The freedom of movement allowed LTTE operatives by the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) has helped the Tigers boost their intelligence-gathering capabilities, including on Colombo-based targets, GSL interlocutors complained. DII Gajananayake cited the LTTE's successful assassination of 24 GSL informants over the past three months as proof of the Tigers' extensive intelligence network. According to Gajananayake, the DII has been unable to make similar advances because of financial and legal constraints. The DII has only a shoestring budget, while "money is nothing for the LTTE." He lamented the suspension of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) under the Ceasefire Agreement. Without the PTA, suspects must be produced before a magistrate within 24 hours--not enough time to "interrogate" them adequately, he charged. On the military side, Herath and Hendawitharana expressed concern over the LTTE's growing capability at sea and the GSL's limited ability to monitor such developments. Both officials thought that the Sea Tigers, the group's naval wing, were developing their underwater demolition expertise. In response, however, the DMI stated that the GSL did not have the resources to develop adequate naval capacity to deal with the growing concern. (There were not even enough resources for adequate coastal narcotics interdiction, according to the Public Security Secretary.) Despite the LTTE's military expertise, the DMI added that there was no evidence the group was in communication or involved with other known global terrorist groups. Domestically, however, the ceasefire had allowed LTTE cadre free movement in the government areas and the DMI and Public Security Secretary made similar comments that the LTTE has conducted intelligence gathering on Colombo-based targets. Regarding border security issues, Ranaviraja told Ambassador Black that the GSL has approved the draft Memorandum of Intent (MOI) with the USG for the Terrorist Interdiction Program/ Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (TIP/PISCES) and will be ready to sign the MOI shortly.

OTHER NATIONS' ROLES

19. (C) Ambassador Black asked the Foreign Secretary to describe neighboring nations' roles in supporting GSL efforts toward a negotiated solution to the conflict. Characterizing India as "very supportive," Palihakkara said that some Western countries, especially those in the EU, should adopt a "firmer line" against the LTTE, especially with regard to illicit financial transactions. That said, he acknowledged that the EU's August 16 statement condemning recent Tiger violations had been "very helpful." Ambassador Black committed to redoubling USG efforts, including on the margins of the upcoming UNGA, to persuade EU partners to maintain such helpful pressure on the LTTE.

SRI LANKA'S MUSLIM POPULATION

110. (C) Ambassador Black asked several interlocutors about Sri Lanka's Muslim community and if there were any signs of radicalization or militancy. Ranaviraja felt that Sri Lankan Muslims, in general, were comfortable and went to the Middle East only for employment opportunities to send money home. He admitted to some tensions among Muslims in the ethnically diverse East, but said there was no evidence of arms collecting. Responding to a query that the Muslims in the East were acquiring the weapons abandoned by LTTE's Eastern military commander, Ranaviraja said only a few of the abandoned weapons had been traced to Muslims but admitted that the majority of the weapons cache remained unaccounted for.

MEDIA ROUNDTABLE

111. (U) Sri Lankan media coverage of Ambassador Black's statements and interviews was extensive, with all papers running front-page or prominent inside page stories, some with a photo of Black. The stories were based on a media roundtable Black held with six editors of the main English and vernacular newspapers. Sinhala-language papers as well as English newspapers played up Black's denunciation of the LTTE and his call for the group to renounce terrorism in word and deed. Tamil papers highlighted his statements calling for both sides to return to the negotiating table. Sri Lanka's two leading TV stations, independent MTV and government-owned Rupavahini, ran lengthy excerpts during their prime-time evening newscasts (in English, Sinhala, and Tamil) of interviews they conducted with Ambassador Black. Both emphasized his call for the LTTE to renounce terrorism. No editorials have yet appeared commenting on Black's statements, although we expect a few to be published in the coming days. The full transcript of Black's press briefing is available on the embassy's web site.

COMMENT

112. (C) Ambassador Black's meetings with GSL officials served to underline our determination to keep the LTTE designated as an FTO, a stance warmly welcomed by the GSL. Moreover, GSL officials listened carefully to and largely agreed with Ambassador Black's presentations on global U.S. counterterrorism efforts. Moreover, the broad and prominent coverage generated by Ambassador Black's media round table and separate TV interviews helped reinforce to the public our messages that the LTTE must renounce violence, and that both sides must move towards a negotiated settlement as the only possible solution to the conflict. Finally, Ambassador Black's visit succeeded in highlighting to the GSL and to the public U.S. satisfaction with the good cooperation Sri Lanka has shown on counterterrorism issues. END COMMENT.

113. (U) Ambassador Black cleared this cable.
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